The forgotten Kuwait on our own doorstep

TL23

EAST TIMOR

Keeping the flame of freedom alive

A Development Dossier
Australian Council for Overseas Aid

Australian Council for Overseas Aid

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Opinions expressed in this Dossier are not necessarily those of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid.

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Introduction

In September 1990 an Australian lawyer, Robert Domm, trekked into the mountains of East Timor to meet with the leader of the resistance to Indonesian rule in East Timor, Xanana Gusmao.

This publication contains an account of that hazardous mission and the resulting interview with Xanana, the first such encounter since Indonesia seized East Timor in 1975 and cut it off from the outside world.

Our purpose in publishing these documents is not to glorify the exploits of Xanana or, indeed, Robert Domm, remarkable though these have been in the teeth of Indonesia's heavy military presence. Our intention is rather to draw attention to the central issues, namely the tragedy of the on-going conflict in East Timor and, most importantly, the peace proposal advanced by Xanana in his interview and the responsibility of the international community to the East Timorese people.

After fifteen years of Indonesian rule, the situation in East Timor remains deeply conflictual.

Some concessions have been made in recent times such as an easing of restrictions on access (making Robert Domm's visit possible) and a reduction in some of the grosser human rights abuses. The reality is, however, that more than ever the territory is dominated economically, socially, militarily and politically by Indonesians at the expense of the East Timorese.

This is the source of the deep resentment and frustration felt by the East Timorese, including youth who have known only Indonesia's rule, and is manifested in various forms of resistance which the Indonesian authorities appear incapable of understanding or responding to other than by physical repression. The situation is thus inherently unstable and, unless alternatives are found, the long term prospects are for continuing conflict, human rights abuses and suffering.

Against this background, it would be irresponsible, indeed outrageous, were a peace initiative by the one of the leading protagonists to be ignored or rejected because of a lack of support internationally.

Towards the end of his interview, Xanana makes a substantial peace gesture to Jakarta on behalf of the East Timorese people whose suffering and sense of betrayal by the world community he has eloquently described.

The gesture is simple: let's talk. It comes across as a serious and considered offer from a man of integrity who, though pressed, is clearly

neither romantic nor desperate. Pointing out that force has achieved nothing, Xanana urges Jakarta to be more flexible and open. He proposes a ceasefire then offers to talk without preconditions. "I can only say that I'm ready to discuss any project for a solution without preconditions, and under the auspices of the UN", he tells Domm.

Indonesia has already rejected this offer out of hand. However the matter should not be allowed to rest there any more than efforts to resolve analogous situations such as the Gulf crisis or Cambodia should be abandoned because of intransigence on the part of one of the parties involved or other demands on the resources of the international community.

The United Nations, which has official carriage of this issue, and the world community, including the Indonesian people, must insist that Indonesia takes up Xanana's offer to talk.

The proposal has the majority support of the US House of Representatives. On 19 November 1990, over half the House members, including 53 Republicans, called on the US 'to support a process of peace talks that could lead to negotiations without preconditions among the parties directly involved'.

US lawmakers have written a number of letters of concern about East Timor. This is the first time they have thrown their considerable weight behind peace talks.

Their initiative is a significant breakthrough. What is urgently needed now are similar statements of support for peace talks from other parliaments, non-government organisations and church networks around the world. Australia, rightly criticised by Xanana for its shameful betrayal of the East Timorese people, should be in the forefront of this peace mission.

Xanana's peace proposal offers the best prospect for a proper resolution of this tragic conflict because it comes from the East Timorese people themselves. It must not be allowed to wither for want of broad support by people of good will everywhere.

PAT WALSH

Historical Background

East Timor was invaded by the Indonesian armed forces on 7 December 1975. Until then, for 400 years, East Timor had been a neglected backwater in Portugal's colonial empire. Imperfectly colonised, it was politically and economically undeveloped and virtually unknown to the outside world. West Timor, as a part of the Dutch East Indies, automatically become part of Indonesia when it achieved independence from Holland in 1949.

The people, many of whom lived on the edge of subsistence, numbered about 680,000 in 1975. They had long experience of repression. Numerous revolts against colonial rule had been brutally repressed. In 1912 thousands died in a major uprising, and it is believed that up to 40,000 East Timorese died during Japanese operations against Australian forces during the Second World War. A civil war between two major parties, Fertilin and UDT, which were formed following Portugal's decision to decolonise in 1974, cost an estimated 3000 lives.

No-one, however, was prepared for the calvary that followed Indonesia's invasion in 1975. The ferocity of the Indonesian assault and the persistence of Timorese resistance have turned East Timor into the site of one of the 20th century's most cruel wars, and an extraordinary struggle for freedom.

The loss of life has been enormous. Up to 20,000 East Timorese have died as a result of the hostilities. Many thousands were killed or executed during the initial attack. The population, seeking refuge in the mountains, was then decimated in 1978-79 by famine and aerial bombardment. Since then the Indonesian military has used draconian methods to suppress the guerilla resistance movement, and has continued to cause immense suffering to the civilian population.

Entire districts have been relocated and forcibly resettled in camps under military surveillance. In many areas food production has been dislocated or destroyed to suit military strategy. Torture, arbitrary arrests and killings have been commonplace. Freedom of movement and expression have been suppressed. For many years the territory has been almost completely isolated from the outside world.

The international community has recognised the serious character of the abuses that have occurred in East Timor. The issue remains on the agenda of the United Nations. Senior Western leaders from the United States and the European Community have criticised the Indonesian gov-

ernment on its record. Nevertheless, little effective pressure has been brought to bear on Indonesia, and UN-sponsored talks between Indonesia and Portugal (internationally recognised as the administering authority) have continued since 1982 without producing substantive results.

Australia's policy has been 'confusing, contradictory and spiritless', in the words of James Dunn a former Australian consul in East Timor, and has been shaped largely by Australia's wish to advance its interests in the Asian region. Australia accepts Indonesia's annexation of East Timor but regrets the way it was done and the denial of the East Timorese people's right to self-determination. Australia's pragmatism on the issue was sharply highlighted when it signed the Timor Gap Treaty with Indonesia enabling the joint exploitation of the potentially vast reserves of oil and gas in the sea off East Timor's south coast. According to some international lawyers, the Treaty is legally invalid. The contradictions in Australia's policy, and by extension other Western powers, has also been pointed up by the Gulf crisis in which Australia has chosen to side with the victim while closer to home in regard to East Timor it is seen to have sided with the aggressor.

Since the beginning in 1989, when President Suharto relaxed restrictions on access to East Timor, independent observers have been able to visit and see the situation for themselves.

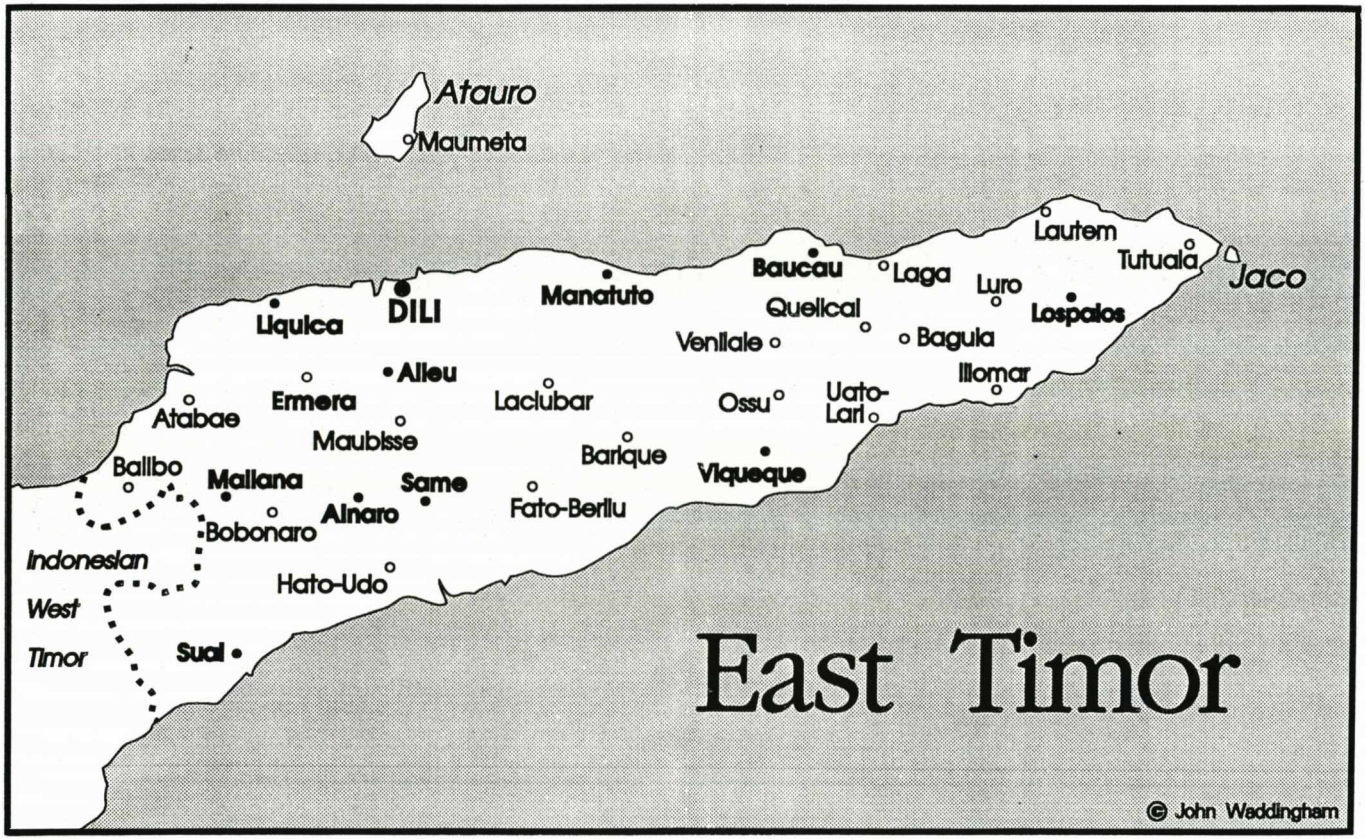
Most have come away acknowledging the material improvements, including schools and clinics, Indonesia has made but deeply disturbed by the pervasiveness of the military and the level of fear and anti-Indonesian sentiment among the people.

An Indonesian study published in March 1990 said it found the people to be 'traumatised' and suffering an 'overdose' of the military. The study said that, unlike the Indonesian government, the people of East Timor do not believe that the problem of decolonisation has been settled. This is the view of the Bishop of the predominantly Catholic East Timorese, Carlos Belo. Last year he wrote to the UN seeking a UN referendum of the people's wishes, pointing out, much to Indonesia's annoyance, that 'the people have yet to be consulted'. Other visitors also paint a bleak picture. After a visit in September 1990, Steven Erlanger of the New York Times described East Timor as 'one of the world's sadder places' and said Dili, the capital, 'has the feeling of a police state'. The influx of tens of thousands of Indonesian settlers since the opening up is resented as a new phase in the colonisation of Timor.

The opening of East Timor, however, has also increased awareness among East Timorese, especially the youth, of uprisings such as the intifada and the struggle for self-determination of the captive communities in the Baltic states, and has opened a window on the world previously closed to

them. Encouraged by the presence of foreigners they have used the visits of prominent personalities such as the Pope and the US Ambassador to Indonesia, to publicise their struggle and appeal for foreign support. This has resulted in repeated clashes with the authorities who, despite an avowed hearts and minds policy, have responded by torturing, beating and jailing demonstrators and engaging in vigilante activity.

The outlook it not good. 'I am not optimistic', East Timor's Indonesian appointed governor Mario Carrascalao told a recent visit. 'We are still very far from giving them their dignity back — so they can stand where they like and say what they feel. Life is better now, but only compared to the situation in the past. But it is not a good situation here — it's not'.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First Contact: An Australian Visits Xanana's Camp

Fifteen years ago, 6 Australians were killed in Timor by Indonesian troops while trying to report the Indonesian invasion. No one has since dared make the hazardous trek to the mountains to speak directly to the only people not under Djakarta's rule, and bring their voice to the outside. A few week's ago, an Australian citizen, Robert Domm, made the trip for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, interviewed the guerilla commander, Xanana Gusmao, and brought back six cassette tapes. ABC radio producer, Mark Aarons, has written this exclusive report.

The guerilla officer pointed vaguely and said encouragingly, 'we're very close now, it's just up ahead.' The Timorese knew that his Australian companion was just about done for. For the past 20 kilometres the security unit had insisted that they travel at a forced march. The rugged mountains were literally teeming with Indonesian troops patrolling the dense jungle. They knew that the resistance leader, Xanana Gusmao, was in the area and desperately wanted to capture or kill him.

By then Robert Domm was already exhausted, dripping with sweat and covered in a thick coat of mountain dust. Domm squinted into the late afternoon light and silently groaned. He looked up and all he could see was 'this mini-Mattahorn' covered with jungle. It seemed totally inaccessible. From where the small group was standing at the foot of the mountain it was impossible to tell that anyone was there, let alone how to get up it. 'For the guerilla to say it was just up there made it sound very easy. But getting up that mountain was no easy task,' Domm recalled a few days later. But they did it, and eventually arrived at Xanana's well hidden and constructed base camp. The first direct contact in 15 years with the Timorese military leadership was made just before 6pm, Thursday, 27 September 1990.

A few hours earlier, Domm and his battle hardened bodyguards had met just outside a tiny Timorese hamlet. Domm's first impression was that they were a somewhat rag-tag band. This was the security unit assigned to escort him through the mountains and protect his life. 'They'd arranged a welcoming reception in the form of a formal military stand to attention and presenting of arms. I have to say frankly that my first impression was that they were somewhat sloppy.' Their timing was out, some putting their guns on their left shoulders, others on the right. They had none of the regimented, military precision one would expect in a disciplined army. They seemed awkward and strangely incongruous. Although they all wore uniforms, no two were alike. Some wore 'Afro' hairstyles, and each was distinctive, far removed

form a conventional army's neatness and uniformity. 'My first reaction was "oh no, I thought these guys were a bit better than this." It was like they'd sent out a younger version of Dad's Army to protect me.'

Domm reflected on the traditional Timorese ritual that had occurred shortly after they had set out for Dili. Suddenly the car had stopped and one of the men asked him to unbutton his shirt. His companions at this stage were members of the local underground. One produced a green leaf, dipped his finger into a supposedly magical substance and drew a symbol on Domm's chest and forehead, and then repeated the ritual on the others. He explained that 'now the Indonesians won't see us, we'll be invisible to them.' Although Domm joined in with good humour, he quietly hoped that they were not putting too much faith in this tradition.

After 2 days travelling through the inaccessible mountains, the Australian thought twice. They had passed by thousands of Indonesian troops, on occasions within metres of them, 'but they never saw me.' Perhaps the tradition had worked, after all. More likely, the success of Domm's mission is explained by the extraordinary, military-like precision with which the East Timorese resistance organised the mission. Domm is the first outsider to gain an overview of the resistance's organisation; others have known parts of the network, but he saw first hand how the underground operates in the Indonesian-controlled towns and villages, and how the guerillas live in the bush.

Once out in the bush, Domm quickly realised that his initial impression of the guerillas was quite wrong. In the mountains, they rapidly demonstrated their skills as a guerilla army. 'They don't march up and down in military parades, they're not like the Indonesian army which is trained like that,' Domm reports. 'But in terms of being able to get through the mountains at great speed, take the best vantage points, liaise with the local people and seize the initiative from the Indonesian troops, they are a formidable force.'

The inhospitable terrain is in fact the guerillas' best friend. When he reached their camp on top of the 'mini-Mattahorn', Domm could not see it, even from about 10 metres. 'Suddenly Xanana Gusmao emerged, and one of the guerillas said "there's our leader". I looked up and realised we were there. So you can see how difficult it is for the Indonesians to find them.' The last stretch was very steep, and by then he was on his hands and knees. He struggled to his feet, shook Xanana's hand and said: 'it's been a long time, Sir, 15 years.' The guerilla legend smiled shyly and simply replied, 'yes.'

'The history of the moment struck me immediately,' Domm told me a few days later. 'We'd had to climb this mountain, struggling to the top, totally exhausted. That last climb epitomised the difficulty of communications. It's a struggle all the way, just to get to these people.' For 15 years no outsider had

made it. 'For me as a European going to their base camp, it was almost like first contact with a white man. They were like a lost tribe which had been cut off from the world, cut off in time, and suddenly this strange being had entered their world, this strange white man. And they were very shy, as you'd expect a lost tribe to be.' After a while, this wore off, and they relaxed a bit. Although Domm shared a few jokes with them, he was glad he was not fighting them. 'They are all very tough, even the young, baby faced guys. The older men who've been up there for many years were clearly very hardened soldiers.'

Work on making direct contact with Xanana had been underway at the ABC for quite a few years. Earlier this year, I met Robert Domm at a function, and we talked all night about East Timor. As a young seaman in the 1970s he had travelled many times to the Portuguese colony, and when Djakarta 'normalised' the territory in January 1989, he was one of the first to take advantage of the easing of travel restrictions and visit as a tourist.

Shortly after returning from his recent gruelling ordeal, Domm explained his motive for doing something that could have ended in his own death. 'I felt it was important that the true story of East Timor be finally told to the world. For 13 years after the invasion, it was a closed society, and only a few selected journalists were permitted to visit selected areas. When you speak to the people today and you hear the countless stories of mass killings, torture, arbitrary arrests and executions, you can't help but feel that this is a story which must be told, and has not been adequately told to date.'

Domm's three weeks in Indonesia and Timor were extremely psychologically demanding. 'I was well aware that 6 Australian media people had been killed by Indonesian troops, and that they are anxious to prevent information getting out from the guerillas. I knew that I'd have to evade the Indonesian army to get to the mountains. Knowing this, there was a real possibility that I, and the resistance people travelling with me, wouldn't make it back. I had to reconcile myself to the real possibility that I may have been killed, and that's a very difficult thing to do.'

Domm found a very different situation from that portrayed by the Generals in Djakarta. 'The Indonesians claim that the situation is normal. But it's one of the most abnormal societies I've ever been to. I expected a lot of resistance, but I never realised that it was so well organised and so extensive. In Dili and many other towns there were numerous people involved in the operation to smuggle me to the mountains. Once out of Dili there were people everywhere, monitoring our movements at every stage, organising and scouting ahead to ensure that we got to the army's base camp and returned safely. That really opened my eyes, because there are over 10,000 troops in that tiny country. We went through them everywhere in the

mountains, and it was only that local network of civilians which saved our skins. The small group with me could not have protected me from that sort of military power. Our only protection was the local people, and their bush telegraph. It's all word of mouth and foot out there.'

They desperately needed this network to evade the numerous Indonesian patrols, especially the small, well camouflaged and mobile patrols hiding in the jungle. 'I saw them everywhere on the roads, patrolling on foot, crammed into military transport trucks, and travelling in armoured vehicles. Once off the beaten tracks they were also everywhere, and although I couldn't see them, the Timorese could. I was a bit like a blind person. I could have walked right over them without knowing because they blend in so effectively. But the resistance knew where they were, because information was passed to the security unit by the local people.'

To ensure Domm's safety, the guerillas had spread out all along the route. Like the Indonesians, they were simply everywhere. 'They would spring up out of trees, and the security unit knew exactly where the people were hiding. I would suddenly see a guerilla talking to a tree, and I'd look around and a soldier would suddenly appear from nowhere.' Xanana's base camp seemed to be ringed with this protective cordon of fighters and peasants, all looking for signs of an Indonesian advance. If one had come, resistance runners would have swiftly brought the news.

The mountain stronghold had been dug out of the side of the mountain and small, temporary huts erected to give a little protection. It was a military camp, well positioned and camouflaged. 'They are a highly disciplined army', Domm says, 'and every solider had a gun, mostly captured from the Indonesians, because they were American weapons which had been supplied to the Indonesian army.'

Domm's stay at the camp was by necessity very brief, as a clockwork-like plan had been developed to spirit him back to Dili. It was a 'no nonsense' 18 hours. After a short 'breather and a drink of water', they got down to business. 'We started the interview almost immediately. It was about 6 o'clock in the evening and the light was fading fast. The first session went through to about 1 o'clock in the morning', interrupted only by a brief meal. Even this was unexpected, for they served Domm 'cakes, *sates* and noodles, and what appeared to be venison meats. They prepared coffee, we had a glass of whiskey at one stage, and they served the meals on glass plates. This was a special occasion for them. The only problem was that I wasn't hungry.'

The guerilla leader's demeanour changed noticeably through the interview. At first somewhat shy and awkward, he loosened up and relaxed. 'He hadn't met any outsider for 15 years, he seemed to have lost an element of the "civilised world", if I can call it that. He'd never done an interview before

and didn't know what to expect, but he was an articulate, intelligent and very thoughtful man, who answered the questions fully and frankly and very spontaneously. He was very honest, admitting past mistakes and deficiencies. His only reluctance to answer questions was that he wanted to avoid exposing the underground organisation and put people at risk.'

The thing that struck Domm most about his host was how out of place he seemed in his surroundings. 'He doesn't seem to belong in the mountains, he's not the type of person you'd expect to spend 15 years there. You'd expect to find him drinking coffee and discussing politics in a sidewalk cafe in metropolitan Lisbon. He's clearly a well read man, and his knowledge of world events was very good. He was gentle and humorous, but also a very hard and strict man. His army is a strict hierarchy and he's the head, his word must be obeyed. He seems to be cut in that mould of the classic, charismatic Latin guerilla leader. What struck me was that combination of intellectual and soldier.'

It was easy now for Domm to understand the reverence with which he had heard Xanana's name mentioned back in Dili. 'The Timorese see him as a living symbol of their resistance. To them, he's a precious item, in that Xanana is there in the mountains, and the Indonesians haven't been able to capture him in 15 years. Despite all their best efforts, throwing as many troops as they could at him, they can't get him. With all their sophisticated US technology, he continues to survive and mount attacks against them. The people in Dili believe there's hope in the hills, it's not all bleak, they haven't been totally subjugated, because their leader is up there. That's the way they see him, sort of like a beacon. He's keeping the flame of freedom alive.'

At midday on 28 September, Domm left the camp to make his dangerous return to Dili. As he packed his small shoulder bag, he looked at the tiny Sony Walkman I had given him to record the interview. The symbolism seemed somehow tragic. 'I thought "what's on that little bit of plastic and metal represents 15 years of struggle and resistance. They'd put this major effort into doing it, involving around 200 people directly and many more indirectly to get me in and out alive, just for 6 lousy cassette tapes.'

The return to Dili cast new light on the 10 agonising days Domm had spent there, waiting under the watchful eye of Indonesian security for his trip to begin. He understood much more clearly just how well organised the Timorese resistance are. While the Indonesians have 'opened up' the country, this has given the underground time and space to organise. 'The situation in Dili has eased since I was there in January last year. Then, people were reluctant to talk to you or even look at you. They are a lot more friendly and relaxed now, and willing to talk.' But the message was far from relaxed. 'Countless people would suddenly show me their scars in the middle of

friendly conversations. Some had bullet wounds in the chest, others explained that the scars came from electric shocks to their legs and arms. Others were legless, and claimed they'd been hacked off with machetes by Indonesian troops.' Domm was soon hardened to these horrors.

Perhaps the most remarkable insight he gained was of the younger generation, the children who never lived under Portuguese rule, and have only known the Indonesians. 'They've made great efforts to convince the young that they've brought improvements', Domm said. 'But you can't kill a father and then say to the son you can now go to school built by the killers, and expect the son to be grateful.' In Dili, countless primary, secondary and tertiary students approached him, 'because they felt they could talk to me, as a European. None of them accepts Indonesian rule.'

From his many conversations with the local people, he discovered 'a dark underside to Dili,' a daily battle between the security apparatus, especially military intelligence, and the underground. 'From what I saw, Indonesian intelligence puts an intense effort into turning people into double agents or informants. So the dark underside, which a tourist sitting in a nice hotel could easily never see, is this continual struggle. It's a nasty, violent, dark underside to the place.'

After a few days, Domm discovered that there was an unofficial curfew in the town, following the recent demonstration at a Catholic ceremony, and night time attacks by Timorese on Indonesians. In response, 'the Indonesian military has formed a new death squad, called the *Ninja.* They dress in black and cover their heads with black hoods, visit peoples' homes late at night and early in the morning, and take them away, apparently never to be seen again.'

As far as Robert Domm could tell, the Indonesians need every weapon of terror and surveillance to keep the underground in check. 'In Dili, it's a classic situation of popular resistance, people in the army, intelligence, police, shops and hotels, all ostensibly participating in Indonesian rule are all really resistance people, who are regularly providing intelligence to the guerillas in the mountains.'

It was only on his return to the capital that Domm appreciated just how important the 'men in the bush' are to the towns. In the eyes of the Timorese living under the Indonesians, 'the guerillas are not bowing down to anybody. They live that hard life, but they're standing tall, as they see it. What struck me the most going back to Dili, straight from the guerillas' camp, was a sense of revulsion towards the Indonesians. They suddenly seemed ugly, crass and obscene in their attitudes and behaviour. I had Indonesian friends there who I get on well with, and they are basically good people. But they suddenly **struck me as being quite ugly, and I wanted to tell them to get out of this**

place. They've stolen the country, pushed the real people away and taken over the towns. But those real people are up there in the mountains, waiting to come back one day. My impression of the Timorese when I arrived back in Dili was also interesting. In order to survive, they have to show deference, smile and say hullo to the Indonesians. They may well be hardline resistance members, actively working every day against the Indonesians, but publicly they bow and nod and maintain the illusion of being friends. But the people in the towns know that no one has to bow and scrape in the resistance-held areas just to survive.

Back in Sydney, Robert Domm has had time to think about the lonely, isolated life led by the tough mountain guerillas he met in East Timor's rugged bush. He has thought long and hard about Prime Minister Hawke's recent statement of support for the United Nations' and Australian roles in the Gulf Crisis. When our ships left Sydney in mid-August, Hawke pledged Australia's support to the principle 'that big countries cannot invade small neighbours and get away with it.' Domm has compared that with Foreign Minister Senator Gareth Evans's claim that there is no international legal obligation for Australia to refuse recognition of the forcible incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia. 'The world is a pretty unfair place', Evans says, 'littered with examples of acquisition by force which have proved irreversible.' Yet the two situations have remarkable parallels: both Kuwait and East Timor have been forcibly occupied by far more powerful neighbours, although the loss of life and violations of human rights in Timor is far worse than in Kuwait; both occupations have been declared illegal by the UN, yet Australia stands by our international commitments in Kuwait, and has abandoned the Timorese to their cruel fate.

And so Domm remembered Xanana's resignation when asked about possible peace solutions. 'He's made numerous proposals to the Indonesians and they never even listen, let alone respond. All they do it send in more troops to try to kill him and his followers. So his attitude is that they just have to keep fighting. But they are prepared to pay that price for as long as it takes, and there's a large reserve of people waiting to go to the mountains if they're called on. When you look at the situation, at the fact that they have survived in the mountains for 15 years without any outside support and they are still launching attacks against the Indonesians, then you can just see that the resistance will go on indefinitely, for another 15 or even 35 years, unless the Indonesians show flexibility, and learn that the way to resolve conflict is not to crush their enemies, but to negotiate peace. And that is what Xanana was asking, his message to the world was to pressure Indonesia to resolve the conflict, to show flexibility. It's not asking so much, I think, for the world, and particularly Australia, to pressure Indonesia to resolve the conflict,

because these people don't want to keep fighting. But they're forced to, or face being wiped out as a nation, as a people.'

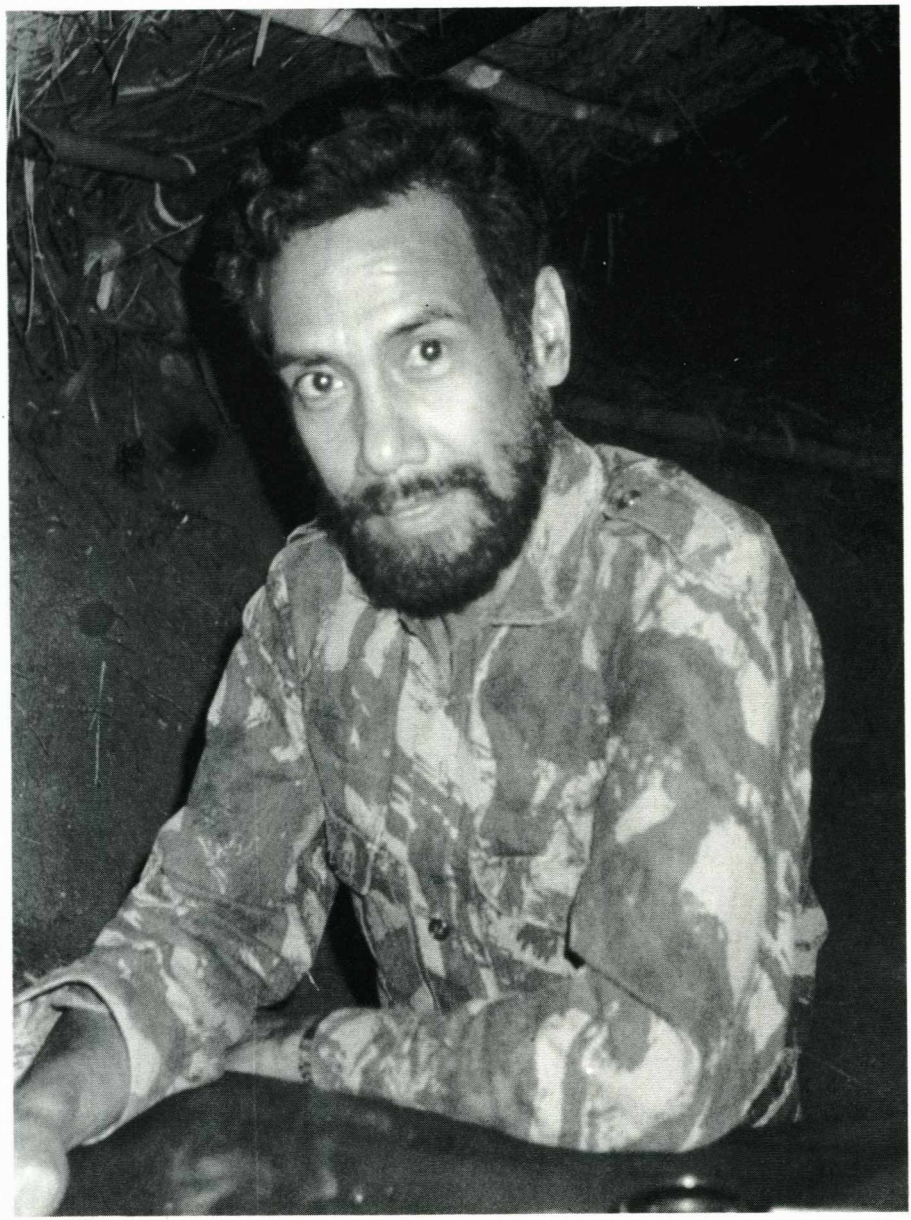
For the East Timorese, the struggle for survival is getting harder. Transmigration from Indonesia, and a decade and a half of increasingly sophisticated and brutal warfare are taking their toll. In the next few weeks a special UN mission is scheduled to visit the territory, which the UN still recognises as Portuguese. After 15 years of almost complete isolation, it will be the first UN visit since the Indonesians refused free access to the UN Special Mission in early 1976. There is a glimmer of hope, an opening for the Timorese in the post-Cold War world. Both sides of the 'Iron Curtain' have previously turned their backs on the Timorese Holocaust, and refused effective help.

However, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait has also brought international attention to the plight of the Timorese. According to long time resistance spokesperson, Jose Ramos Horta, there are signs of real action among world leaders. Horta recently met with senior Italian officials who told him that the European Community was embarrassed by their vocal stand in support of Kuwait, and their indifference to East Timor. Shortly afterwards, the Italian Foreign Ministry, speaking on behalf of the European Community, raised East Timor in the UN General Assembly. And in Tokyo there are also indications of a new approach. At a joint press conference with Portuguese Prime Minister Silva, Japan's Prime Minister Kaifu expressed his government's strong support for a mediated solution to the Timorese impasse.

Robert Domm risked his life to bring the Timorese guerillas' message to world attention. From the comfort and safety of Australia, their existence seems a million miles away. 'For 15 years they've only known the mountains, and while they listen to the world on their short wave radios, the world hasn't listened to them. The Indonesians have denied them the right to communicate for all that time, and still do.' The Australian government has actively assisted this censorship, refusing to accept radio messages originating from the resistance, and seizing several two way radio connections established by pro-Timorese Australians.

It is an ironic situation. While virtually no voices were raised at all in the Federal Parliament when it recently approved an agreement with Djakarta to jointly exploit Timor's mineral wealth, in Europe, Japan and Washington there are hundreds of parliamentarians actively supporting and lobbying for a just solution. Next December, a major symposium on the question will be held at Oxford University, to be followed by a Ford Foundation forum in Washington next April. As Horta remarked with some cynicism, 'not one single Labor MP even spoke out against Australia's immoral policy on the Timor Gap Treaty, let alone voted against it.' It is time for Canberra to come clean on our responsibilities towards our tiny neighbour, where an earlier

generation of Timorese laid down their lives to protect Australians from our Japanese enemy in the dark year of 1942.



Mr Xanana Gusmao

An Interview with Xanana Gusmao

LIZ JACKSON:

Hullo and welcome to the tenth anniversary program of *Background Briefing*. I'm Liz Jackson. Today, an exclusive report from the mountainous interior of East Timor, which was invaded and forcibly incorporated into Indonesia in 1975. Australia stood by and watched a large nation invade a small neighbour, without lifting a finger. No frigates were dispatched then to aid the Timorese.

Six Australian journalists who went to cover the situation were murdered by Indonesian troops. In the fifteen years since then, no outsider has made the hazardous trek through the jungles of East Timor to speak directly with the resistance fighters. Indeed, Indonesia has long claimed that the resistance has been crushed.

But last month *Background Briefing* sent Robert Domm to seek out the guerillas. He was taken by the Timorese underground, under the very noses of the Indonesian army, to a meeting with the leader of the East Timorese resistance, Xanana Gusmao.

Robert Domm presents this exclusive report. The program was conceived and produced by Mark Aarons.

ROBERT DOMM: This is Robert Domm reporting for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation from the Military Headquarters of the Armed Resistance to Indonesian occupation of East Timor. The Headquarters is situated deep in the hills of East Timor, and for the first time in 15 years since Indonesia invaded in 1975, I'm talking to the commander of the Falintil, the armed forces of the Resistance. Good evening Mr Xanana.

XANANA GUSMAO: Good evening.

ROBERT DOMM: Over the last twenty years I've visited East Timor on a number of occasions, both when it was a Portuguese colony and soon after it was 'opened up' by Jakarta in January 1989. So I know something of the people and their difficult situation.

But the countless stories I heard on this trip were chilling. People in the streets told me of massacres, torture and forced relocation from their traditional villages into concentration camps.

Yet according to the Indonesian government, the situation is now normal in East Timor and the resistance belongs to the past. But like other recent

visitors I found it one of the most abnormal societies I've ever been to. I'd been told to expect a lot of resistance, but the extensive underground surprised me.

In the towns and countryside hundreds of people were involved in the operation to smuggle me into the mountains. In the bush there were people everywhere, protecting us at every stage, scouting ahead to ensure that we got to the guerillas' base camp and returned safely.

There are over 10,000 troops in that tiny country and we had to pass through them everywhere. It was only the local civilians who saved our skins. The few guerillas I travelled with couldn't have protected me from the Indonesian troops.

To meet with *X*anana Gusmao we had to secretly leave Dili and travel by car for many hours. We then walked for perhaps 20 kilometres through the rugged mountains. Finally, when I thought I was done for, one of the guerillas pointed and said 'we're very close now, it's just up ahead'.

I looked up and saw this mini-Matterhorn covered with jungle and totally inaccessible. From where we stood you wouldn't have known anyone was there, let alone how to get up it.

By the time we reached the camp I was exhausted, climbing on my hands and knees. Suddenly Xanana appeared from nowhere, and I scrambled up, shook his hand and said 'it's been a long time, sir, 15 years'. The history of the moment struck me immediately.

We'd had to climb this mountain, struggling to the top, exhausted and dripping with perspiration. That last climb epitomised their difficulties. For 15 years no outsider had got to them and they seemed like a lost tribe. But once the interview got underway, I realised that the guerilla commander was an extremely intelligent and sophisticated man.

ROBERT DOMM: How well organised is the underground in the towns, the resistance underground, and how does it work?

XANANA GUSMAO: We can't define with clarity how the underground works, since this would harm the resistance. But at this moment the underground is at an unsurpassed level, for which we've been striving for the past 15 years.

There are popular organisations at almost every concentration camp — even in Oe Cusse and at Suai, Bobonaro, Maliana, Liquica and Ermera, areas where at this time we don't have a military presence. When we talk about concentration camps we mean not only the small villages that are further into the countryside, but also the towns and even Dili, which is the centre of clandestine activities.

The enemy knows this, it's not a secret. The level of the underground organisation enables us to say once more that if Jakarta continues to be inflexible the war will not end so soon.

ROBERT DOMM: It was this underground that organised my trip into the mountains. A civilian messenger guided us to a pre-arranged point where we met the armed security unit assigned to escort me through the mountains. They'd arranged a formal reception and presentation of arms.

My first impression was that they were somewhat sloppy. It was like they'd sent a younger version of Dad's Army out to protect me. But once in the mountains I realised how wrong I'd been.

These men are clearly guerilla soldiers. They don't march up and down in military parades. But they're highly skilled at travelling rapidly through the mountains. They seemed a formidable force, capable of seizing the best vantange points to attack the Indonesians.

XANANA GUSMAO: In the current situation the guerillas try to minimise their great difficulties. After 15 years, obviously everyone understands that without any support from outside, Falantil can't think about great military successes. The enemy's current tactic is to suffocate us with constant military action, and we try to neutralise and accommodate each attack that the enemy unleashes against us.

ROBERT DOMM: How do the Indonesian troops conduct their operations against the Resistance?

XANANA GUSMAO: Every offensive which the enemy launches is aimed at our extermination. It doesn't have any other purposes. If we go back to the guerilla warfare period in 1981, Indonesia launched an offensive in which it used almost all the people of East Timor.

In 1983 to 84 they used their entire arsenal — war ships, tanks, airplanes, mortars, cannons — in battalions which we got tired of counting. Later, in 1986 to 87 they used elite troops, special forces in counter insurgency warfare, when they began to use 'territorial guerilla warfare'. This doesn't involve a great number of military personnel, but well defined planning and well defined periods of time, during which they spread their forces out completely in small groups.

In 1988, they launched a new offensive, again with a big military force, but since then Indonesia has reduced the number of military personnel and are using Timorese conscripts for counter insurgency.

ROBERT DOMM: How, in fact, did they use the population?

XANANA GUSMAO: They cover an entire area with the people, and then attack another area. Then they move and in this way they practically cover

everywhere. The population is used to cover the terrain, so that they push us into the Indonesian troops and force us to clash with them. For instance, if they thought we were in this mountain, they'd mobilise all the population of the local concentration camps to make a circle which would advance on us. The Indonesian troops would then begin their push, and if we didn't escape in time we'd clash with them.

ROBERT DOMM: What are the current tactics applied by the Indonesian troops? How do they conduct their operations now?

XANANA GUSMAO: Now they're using territorial counter insurgency, in which they launch small groups in every direction in a particular area, so that we're constantly in armed clashes with them. They also use larger forces where there are bigger guerilla forces, supported by counter insurgency troops. Counter insurgency has the following features: it spreads out in a large area; it has a fantastic capacity for mobility, so that they can very quickly detect our presence. This makes it very difficult for us to take initiatives, because we don't have a permanent, fixed enemy. It has no real volume or quantity, and we don't know what to confront. We feel that the enemy is everywhere; we even say that we carry them in our bags.

ROBERT DOMM: The clearest sign that the war continues unabated is the massive presence of Indonesian troops. Although tourists see them everywhere, I actually had to move undetected through their lines in the bush. They were extremely well camouflaged and although I couldn't see them, the guerillas spotted them.

They're helped by a network of civilians who sustain the guerillas in their daily battles. But for ordinary Timorese, the cost is very high. While I was there, the Indonesians formed a new death squad, called the 'Ninja', which dresses in black hoods and kidnaps suspects in the night.

ROBERT DOMM: Mr Xanana, what effect does this war between your troops and the Indonesians have on the civilian population?

XANANA GUSMAO: I would say an horrendous effect, since the war has caused so many deaths, and so much suffering to our people. All the atrocities you hear about outside are only a very, very small part of what actually happens in East Timor. But since the peoples' resistance continues, this is the war's true effect.

Timorese women feel even more oppressed than men. There are so many cases of disrespect to women — violations, abuses, threats. Many women gave their lives for their honour, others were subjugated by force. An entire platoon raping a woman, sexually abusing her until she's almost dead. Many gave their lives, others preferred a bullet to dishonour, while others couldn't resist.

This is a bestial attitude, they are assassins, inhuman and everything that is Timorese is to be destroyed, violated, oppressed and killed.

ROBERT DOMM: What is your estimation of the number of civilians who have been killed in the last 15 years? There have been reports in Australia that maybe 100,000 civilians, or people, haved died through fighting and through famine and disease?

XANANA GUSMAO: I believe that it is more than 200,000.

ROBERT DOMM: Can you give me an estimation of how many casualties the Indonesian troops have suffered during that time?

XANANA GUSMAO: I cannot give you an exact figure, because we cannot count the number of enemy soldiers in all our clashes. When we take the initiative and their dead are inside our circle, then we can immediately count them. Usually the Indonesians are careful to take their dead away in helicopters and we don't know where they're all buried. What we do know is that the number of Indonesian military cemeteries is constantly growing. To make an estimate of Indonesian deaths, we could say between 25 and 30 thousand.

ROBERT DOMM: Mr Xanana can you describe for me the difficulties of conducting a war of resistance in East Timor, given the communication problems which you have and the problems associated with the difficult terrain, the mountains?

XANANA GUSMAO: The question is interesting, in the senses that communications are very important. We don't have any means to enable us to quickly have a total view of the military situation throughout the country. We use several groups of guerillas for communication purposes. This has many difficulties — delays because of lack of food, because there are battles along the way, or because the enemy attacks the point where 2 groups planned to meet.

Militarily, this has been our big problem, but we somehow managed to overcome it, by allowing each group to take their own initiatives according to the conditions prevailing there, but within general planning.

Lately, we've had even more difficulties because of the enemy's use of territorial counter insurgency — the launching of small groups in all possible directions in a given zone. But the clandestine organisations have been able to warn us in advance. We must be the only guerilla army in the world with so many difficulties in all aspects — our own subsistence, health care and our capacity to maintain adequate human resources.

But it's our political motivation that sustains us in this war. It's too great for us to lose, our morale is unshakable and this allows us to overcome all our

difficulties. In such a small territory, surrounded by sea on all sides and with a naval blockade imposed by the enemy, you can understand our difficulties.

The fact that we've resisted for 15 years now and we're still able to cry out that we are determined to win, it's because our people demand this, our homeland asks us. I believe that everyone would understand that for us the great difficulties are not really felt, they only strengthen our unity, our determination to search for new methods to face up to these difficulties.

Mr Robert, you can't see these great difficulties, because here my men wear good civilian clothes sent by our parents, brothers and sisters, our children who are in the underground resistance.

Without sanctuaries, our guerillas are very mobile, in the whole sense of that word. Without even the minimum capacity to supply ourselves with weapons and ammunition, without the capacity to create production zones to supply ourselves, without the minimum conditions to create some piece of land, a small factory to make our own clothing, you can understand our great difficulties.

ROBERT DOMM: Xanana Gusmao seemed strangely out of place in the mountains, living a deprived life and hunted daily by a relentless enemy. You'd expect to find him drinking coffee and discussing politics in a sidewalk cafe in Lisbon.

He was gentle and humorous, but also very hard and strict. He seemed to be cut in the mould of the classic guerilla leader — an intellectual but also a soldier.

Meeting him I could understand the reverence in which ordinary Timorese hold him. He's a living symbol of their resistance. Xanana is there in the mountains, and the Indonesians haven't been able to capture him in fifteen years.

Despite all their best efforts, their sophisticated American technology and thousands of troops, he survives to mount attacks against them.

The people in the towns believe there's hope in the hills, it's not all bleak. They haven't been totally subjugated because their leader is in the mountains. They see him as a beacon, keeping the flame of freedom alive. Holding aloft the banner of what they call 'Maubere' nationalism.

ROBERT DOMM: Can you explain how important to you are the Timorese students? Can you describe how they are organised, and can you indicate the importance to you of the recent demonstrations which they've organised?

XANANA GUSMAO: These students are of great significance, but it's not very convenient for us to talk about the way they're organised. However,

they're completely organised and mobilised to take practical actions in the struggle. This is based on their patriotic consciousness, which is in the blood of the Maubere people.

Because it's in our blood, it's not lost, and I think the whole world can understand the phenomenon of Maubere nationalism. It's not our propaganda, it's not an ephemeral, temporary phenomenon but it's in the soul of the people, transmitted from parents to children.

The children at the time of the invasion directly suffered the horrors of the war. They saw their parents being massacred, they saw their mothers being maltreated, their relatives and friends. Many of them lived in the mountains for many, many years. Others were under enemy control from the very beginning.

It's inevitable that a youngster who sees his father massacred should feel hatred towards the assassin. It's obvious that a youth who witnessed these atrocities can't alienate himself from the whole situation in which we all live.

Today's students participate in clandestine organisations from years 3, 4 and 5 of high school. For those born during this criminal occupation, the situation might be a bit different, in that they didn't witness the horrors of the war — the bombardments, the battles, the long marches made in the forests and mountains. But the war didn't end with the loss of our bases in the mountains.

The difficult situation in which the people live under enemy control creates in the children a perception of the injustice of this criminal situation, which affects their own relatives, their neighbours and friends. And they're listening and understanding that in the final analysis it affects the entire Maubere people.

ROBERT DOMM: Well what have been the main changes in the traditional way of life?

XANANA GUSMAO: There've not been a lot of changes. I would say there've been a lot of difficulties for the people to continue their customs and traditions. The Indonesian occupier has been exploiting what they see as Maubere identity, presenting folklore to tourists and foreign delegations. They think that the Maubere identity only resides in cultural manifestations.

This is a failed policy, because the traditional way of life of our people has changed radically in the sense that it was radically prevented. Our people are essentially rooted to their culture and traditions, they have their own concepts of life, of existence and live to realise them. They're impregnated spiritually and existentially with these concepts.

They conceive their passage through Mother Earth as a temporary time,

ephemeral, in which they have to realise their traditional concepts. Our people are profoundly attached to Mother Earth. All their acts, cultural manifestations, and even life, are destined to consecrate, to honour, to worship Mother Earth as life.

There haven't been a lot of changes to this. What happened was that obstacles have been placed in the way of realising these traditions.

ROBERT DOMM: What role does the Catholic Church play in East Timor today? And do you see the Church as being important to the resistance fight?

XANANA GUSMAO: It's very important, even though from outside it might be difficult to fully appreciate it. The Catholic Church in East Timor has played an essentially moral role in regard to the popular resistance. This almost unseen action is felt deeply by our people, because it supports our resistance.

The clergy play an indirect role, strengthening patriotic consciousness and increasingly the people have an enormous trust in the Catholic Church. They feel that it isn't isolated from their suffering, but in solidarity with them. Many priests have been threatened with shooting, for example Father Joao de Deus. Father Locatalli has been interrogated and beaten up many times.

We don't think they'll be able to remove the priests, or force them to quit their responsibility to their people and homeland. We don't think that the Indonesian government can convince the Vatican to expel all the Timorese priests.

ROBERT DOMM: Can I ask you, sir, to comment on the attitude of the Vatican towards East Timor?

XANANA GUSMAO: It's an attitude which betrays a corruption of universal principles. We see the vatican's role in Jakarta's policies. We all know about the expulsion of Monsignor Jopes, and the expulsion of the Portuguese priests and we expect that one day Monsignor Belo will also be expelled. I think that it's an immoral attitude on the Vatican's part and that they're acting in their own political interests.

The statement by Father Tucci who came to prepare the Pope's visit is very revealing. He stated that the Vatican shouldn't sacrifice its interests for the sake of a few hundred thousand Catholics. I don't think that is the most correct attitude. We continue to feel Jakarta's influence on the Vatican and in consequence the influence the Vatican exerts on the Church of East Timor.

ROBERT DOMM: As I slept fitfully in Xanana's simple, but well protected mountain camp, I head the guerillas listening to short wave broadcasts on their modern radios.

The irony of their situation struck me. For fifteen years they've had no voice to the world, yet daily they hear everything that's happening outside.

ROBERT DOMM: Mr Xanana, we may turn now to world events, international events, and firstly I'd like to ask you what do you think of the changes in Eastern Europe, and the impact of those changes on East-West relations?

XANANA GUSMAO: I think that the impact will be positive. The changes taking place in Eastern Europe strengthen humanity's aspirations for democracy and freedom. It's an undeniable proof that universal values must be respect by everyone, everywhere.

The confrontation between East and West caused the division of the world into two camps. The Iron Curtain is now destroyed and I think that the Iron Gates that continue to imprison people will also be destroyed soon.

The Cold War was replaced by a climate which strengthens dialogue and in this regard, my personal opinion is that the world is moving towards an era of true peace, a new era of freedom, justice and democracy.

ROBERT DOMM: Can we turn to the Baltic republics — Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia — which are seeking independence from the Soviet Union? Can you comment on that situation?

XANANA GUSMAO: We think that there is some similarity with that situation to ours on questions of principle, because if principles are universal, then they must benefit everyone. It also demonstrates to the world that the phenomenon of nationalism is a fundamental political question belonging to all peoples.

We understand it's difficult for the Soviet Union, in the face of the threat of dismembering the Union. But Moscow can't suffocate and continue to deny the nationalist desire for independence on the part of the Baltic republics, as well as others in the Soviet Union.

We can only comment on the universality of rights, and we must say that it's further proof that these rights must be respected and implemented, otherwise there'd be no people that could feel free. For example, the Kuwaiti people would feel coerced into allowing others to decide their destiny.

ROBERT DOMM: What are your views on the crisis in the Persian Gulf, or the Middle East, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait?

XANANA GUSMAO: What emerges is the concern by the international community to put an end to disrespect of universal principles. It's a demonstration that there's hope for a more concerted effort on the part of the international community in regard to the fate of the people of the world.

It shows a prompt disposition by the international community to condemn energetically and immediately a violation of universal principles, which the United Nations advocates and the international community shares.

ROBERT DOMM: But despite Xanana's optimism, most Timorese feel isolated and abandoned. They believe the world has betrayed them.

ROBERT DOMM: What do you think of international attitudes towards East Timor?

XANANA GUSMAO: Some attitudes are ambiguous, other irresponsible. In regard to the United States we think it's an attitude of selfishness. This derives from their economic interests in Jakarta. America considers itself to be the bastion of universal values and human rights, yet it makes a distinction between peoples and rights.

America's position today in regard to Kuwait is totally different to its position on East Timor. The Soviet Union in our view behaved on the basis of its own world interests.

ROBERT DOMM: Can you explain to me, Sir, what types of military equipment the Indonesian troops use against the Registance?

XANANA GUSMAO: They use Bronco OV-10s, Skyhawks, and Tigers. The Indonesian troops also use these guns.

ROBERT DOMM: I might just explain for the tape that Mr Xanana is showing me an automatic rifle and it's been captured from the Indonesian troops, and on the side of the rifle it has the words: "Property of US Government, M-16A1 Calibre 5.5 6mm and the serial number is 532 0696" and the rifle is made by Colts Firearms, Colt Industries, Hartford, Connecticut, USA. Actually, this is a semi-automatic.

ROBERT DOMM: Xanana believes the superpowers have failed to live up to their commitments in regard to East Timor. However, given their historical connections with Australia, they feel especially betrayed by Canberra's policies.

AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER BOB HAWKE: Australia has important interests in the Gulf, but also it's important for Australia that the world understands that big countries cannot invade small neighbours and get away with it.

MARK AARONS: What do you say, Senator Evans, to those who would point to Australia's international obligations that we shouldn't be recognising territory acquired by anyone by force?

AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN MINISTER, GARETH EVANS: Well, we don't accept that there's any international legal obligation not to recognise acquisi-

tions of that kind. And, of course, that's a matter that may well prove to be an issue if the question of the Timor Gap Treaty is ever litigated in an international court. And I want to make it clear that we don't recognise, as I say, any such legal obligation. What I can say is simply that the world is a pretty unfair place, that it's littered over the course of the decades and the centuries with examples of acquisitions by force which have proved to be, for whatever reason, irreversible.

XANANA GUSMAO: Australia has been an accomplice in the genocide perpetrated by the occupation forces, because the interests which Australia wanted to secure with the annexation of East Timor into Indonesia are so evident. The best proof is the Timor Gap Agreement. It's inconceivable that a democratic country with a Western way of life, a country which claims to be a defender of human rights should profit from our blood.

We're a small neighbouring people who don't forget our important role in Australia's defence, when many Timorese died so that the Japanese wouldn't invade Australia. So it's an attitude of true betrayal.

ROBERT DOMM: The Timorese are especially angry about the Timor Gap Treaty between Australia and Indonesia. They recall Australia telling them in the 1970s that they were too poor to have their independence. Yet now we've carved up their oil and gas reserves with Jakarta.

XANANA GUSMAO: I think that it's an illegal decision, illegitimate and criminal, in the context that we're being exterminated by a party to this agreement, Australia, with this Treaty becomes an accomplice.

Australia talks loudly about international law, but we can only explain this agreement as a disrespect for principles. There's a principle which says that no acquisition by force is legal. As far as I know Australia is also a signatory to this principle, but denies this with its agreement with Jakarta.

It shows the dirty, cynical and criminal policies practised by the Australia government in regards to East Timor. We feel betrayed that a country with Western values should profit from our people's blood by participating in this rapacious exploitation of something that is in fact legitimately ours.

ROBERT DOMM: It is often said that things have improved more in fifteen years in East Timor under Indonesian rule than in 400 years under Portuguese rule. It's said that there are better schools, better roads, better housing, improved farming methods and improved health facilities. Do you believe this is true, and do you believe that the Timorese are pleased or satisfied by such developments?

XANANA GUSMAO: This is the enemy's strong propaganda point and we hear him talking about this quite often in international forums. We can't

deny that there've been improvements in those aspects you pointed out. However. there never was any real desire on the part of the Indonesians to help the East Timorese. This is a strategy on the part of Jakarta to subjugate the people. There aren't any material benefits which could compensate for our sacrifices. As I've already said, our people have a concept of life which they want to realise while they're alive, in the context of their traditions and customs. That's why a paved road and some houses have no value for them. The Maubera people have their own sense of honour and pride in themselves. material benefits are only to satisfy daily needs and aren't an end in themselves. So our people not only don't benefit from the material improvements, but these are in conflict with their own concepts of life, with their way of living in the economic sphere.

ROBERT DOMM: When I asked Xanana about prospects for a settlement to the protracted war, he seemed resigned yet determined. The Indonesians' only response to his proposals is to send in more troops to try to kill his guerillas.

But there's a large reserve of people waiting to go to the mountains if they're called on. As far as I could tell, the resistance will go on indefinitely unless the Indonesians show flexibility. Xanana's message to the world was to pressure Jakarta for a peaceful resolution.

ROBERT DOMM: Mr Xanana many people may argue that while what has happened in East Timor may be unfortunate, it is now impossible for East Timor to be independent. Realistically, how likely is it that you can achieve your goals, and how long are you prepared to suffer the deprivations of a guerilla life in the bush?

XANANA GUSMAO: Realistically, it's not appropriate for me to tell you here whether I think it's possible for us to achieve independence. We are geared towards the defence of our rights and realistically, all our people desire that. If many people argue that it's impossible for East Timor to be independent at the moment I think they see the question in a simplistic way.

The problem of East Timor is not so simple for Indonesia and the world. We're prepared to continue to resist for as long as necessary, as long as Jakarta doesn't adopt a more flexible, just and responsible attitude.

We're prepared to accept our own extermination, as long as Jakarta think that there's only one way to solve the problem, that there exists only the use of force to make us surrender. So only after Jakarta shows more flexibility can I more realistically comment on how we could achieve independence.

ROBERT DOMM: What are your proposals for a solution in East Timor? Would you be prepared to compromise, for example, to gain autonomy within Indonesia and yet be free to run internal affairs, with Jakarta

running other matters like foreign affairs and defence?

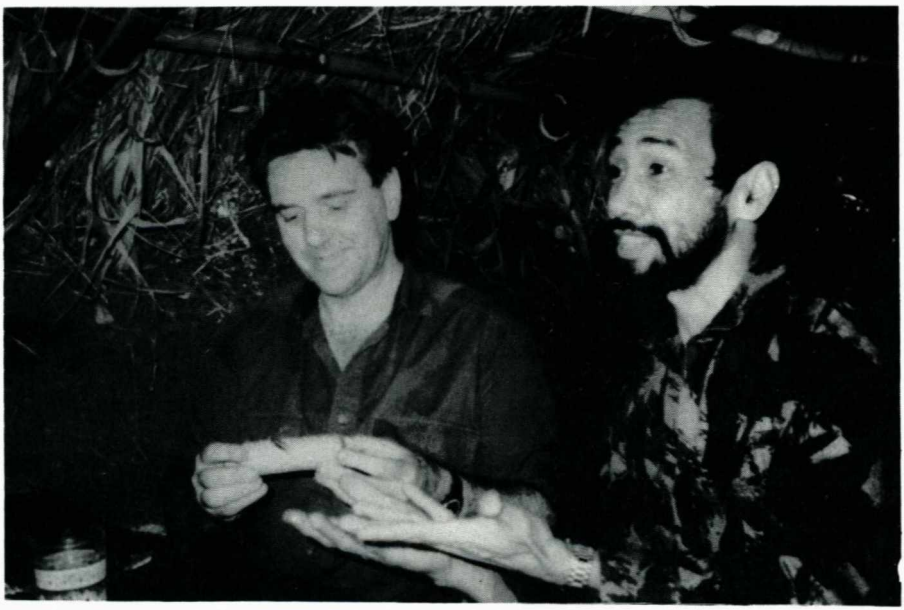
XANANA GUSMAO: I can't comment on that since I'm only one person, and the leadership of the struggle involved Falintil, as well as the nationalist parties. Many proposals have been sent to the world, but none was responded to. I can only say that I'm ready to discuss any project for a solution without preconditions, and under the auspices of the United Nations.

Obviously, nothing could take place here if there was no ceasefire because there would be physical threats to us. So the only essential condition to discuss proposals for a solution is a ceasefire.

LIZ JACKSON:

The voice of Xanana Gusmao, commander of the Falintil resistance forces, speaking with Robert Domm in the mountains of East Timor.

Xanana's proposal for UN supervised negotiations seems a modest one and it may become harder for the Indonesians to ignore it. The international community regards the occupation of East Timor as illegal, and has asked the UN to resolve the issue. The UN and Portugal are both proposing missions to East Timor as a first step, but the Indonesian foreign Minister indicated just last Thursday that unless the Portuguese and the foreign press ceased their campaign of 'slander and misinformation', the missions might be off.



Robert Domm with Xanana Gusmao (r)

Dear Mr Hawke,

I am writing to you as the first outsider in fifteen years to have spoken directly with the leader of the East Timorese resistance, Mr Xanana Gusmao. While I was with Mr Gusmao, he wrote an open letter to the Australian government, and I enclose a copy of the text, transcribed and translated from my tape recording, which was made during my interview with him for the ABC's 'Background Briefing' program.

I believe that I am the first outsider to have gained a complete overview of the true situation in East Timor, and I must say that it is totally at variance with the official statements of both the Indonesian and Australian governments. The level of opposition to Indonesia's illegal and forcible incorporation is overwhelming, even among ordinary Timorese who spoke to me not knowing the real purpose of my visit.

As an Australian, I must tell you that I feel ashamed of my country's policies towards East Timor. They stand in stark contrast to our principled positions on other areas of world conflict, such as Cambodia, Kuwait and South Africa. The Timorese feel betrayed by your attitude, and feel it is hypocritical when compared to our vigorous response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

Whatever may have been the factors leading to your previous policies, I believe that it is now time to re-assess Australia's stance, and make a forceful effort to have the matter peacefully resolved under the auspices of the United Nations. Mr Xanana Gusmao asks that this be done so that his people may also benefit from the new mood sweeping the world following the changes in Eastern Europe.

What he asks for on behalf of his people is little enough: that a ceasefire be called to end the daily battles his forces undertake against the Indonesian army; and that talks commence without preconditions aimed at giving the East Timorese the right to decide their own future, including the option of integration with Indonesia.

It seems a small thing for you to do, but a great step in restoring Australia's international reputation for championing fundamental and universal rights for all peoples, not just those chosen for diplomatic and political reasons.

Yours sincerely
ROBERT DOMM

Letter from Xanana Gusmao, Commander of the Falintil To: The Government of Australia

I express my hope that the Australian government may, and should, do something for the East Timorese people. Australia played a decisive role in the solution to the Cambodian problem. I believe that Australia, in the light of universal principles which it defends, should act more in accordance with these principles.

We reject the statement by Gareth Evans, who establishes differences in the application of the principles of self-determination. The principles of self-determination suggest that it is the right of peoples to decide about their own destinies, and this principles has not established legal sovereignity as a condition for a people to be contemplated by the right to self-determination. It was this principle that enabled the decolonisation of the colonial territories. Therefore, the statement by Gareth Evans is only a rhetorical justification to cover up the illegality of the Timor Gap Treaty.

I hope that the Australian government will realise that its behaviour towards East Timor is not in harmony with the values that it stands for. Only in this way can we hope that the Australian government may play an influential role in the search for a solution to the Timor problem, and the first step would be to influence Jakarta to accept the debate, to accept dialogue with the East Timorese resistance. I seize upon this opportunity to appeal to the friendly Australian people to pressure Canberra to modify its attitude to the tragedy of the East Timorese people, and in consequence to use its influence with Jakarta so that it accepts this dialogue we are proposing.

Dear President Suharto,

I am writing to you as the first outsider in fifteen years to have spoken directly with the leader of the East Timorese resistance, Mr Xanana Gusmao. While I was with Mr Gusmao, he wrote an open letter to the Indonesian government, and I enclose a copy of the text, transcribed and translated from my tape recording, which was made during my interview with him for the ABC Radio program, 'Background Briefing'.

I believe that I am the first outsider to have gained a complete overview of the true situation in East Timor, and I must say that it is totally at varience with the official statements of your government. The level of opposition to your country's illegal and forcible incorporation is overwhelming, even among ordinary Timorese who spoke to me not knowing the real purpose of my visit.

I believe that Indonesia's policies towards East Timor stand in stark contrast to your principled positions on other areas of world conflict, such as Cambodia, Kuwait and South Africa. As a great nation, I believe that Indonesia can afford to show a more just and responsible attitude towards East Timor.

After all, what Xanana Gusmao asks on behalf of his people is little enough: that a ceasefire be called to end the daily battles his forces undertake against the Indonesian army; and a dialogue with you under the auspices of the United Nations. He asks for no preconditions to these talks, merely for the right of the East Timorese to decide their own future, including the option of integration with Indonesia.

Yours sincerely
ROBERT DOMM

Letter from Xanana Gusmao, Commander of the Falintil To: The Government of the Republic of Indonesia

We seize upon this opportunity to address some words to the Indonesian government. We appeal for a change to the inflexible attitude of the Indonesian government. We all feel the effects of the war in Eats Timor. it impacts both sides and we think that we all understand that fifteen years on, there is a need to find a correct solution that satisfied all parties involved and interested. This can only come from dialogue, and we believe that nothing will be lost if we all go to the negotiating table with the purpose of finding a solution that we all desire. We always wanted this dialogue, and we are ready for it. It all depends on the political will of Jakarta.